

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
SSM-03 ACDA-12 AID-05 TRSE-00 /098 W
-----043512 090825Z /10

P R 081503Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7930
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF WASHDC
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USLO RIYADH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 2623

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, LE, SY, PLO
SUBJECT: SYRIA WARY OF SIX-POINT RESOLUTION

1. SUMMARY: INITIAL INDICATIONS HERE ARE THAT THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP IS WARY OF THE SIX-POINT PLAN RECENTLY PASSED BY THE LEBANESE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES AS A BASIS FOR RESTORING THE AUTHORITY OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. SYRIANS WELCOME IT AS A SIGN OF NASCXT CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RECMNCILIATION BUT VIEW PROVISION FOR DISARMING PALESTINIANS AS A POTENTIAL TRAP FOR SYRIA ENGINEERED BY CHAMOUN AND OTHER LEBANESE RIGHTISTS. THEY APPEAR TO HAVE ALREADY INITIATED MOVES AIMED AT FORESTALLING THE NECESSITY OF EITHER CRACKING DOWN ON THE FEDAYEEN OR BEING LABLED AS AN ARMY OF
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OCCUPATION UNRESPONSIVE TO LEBANESE CENTRAL AUTHORITY. WHILE THE SYRIANS ARE WILLING TO EXERT LIMITED PRESSURE AGAIN TO REDUCE THE MAGNITUDE AND PERVASIVENESS OF PALESTINIAN ARMED GROUPS, THERE IS STILL NO EVIDENCE THAT SYRIA IS CONTEMPLATING A MOVE TO THE LITANI OR AN ATTEMPT TO DISARM THE PALESTINIANS. IT DOES, HOWEVER, WANT FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON AND TO THAT END HAS BEEN URGING PLO COOPERATION WITH

UNIFIL. PROGNOSIS IS FOR SYRIA TO ATTEMPT TO MANEUVER BETWEEN CONFLICTING PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE CLAIMS TO ITS SUPPORT WHILE SEEKING TO PREVENT ANY MAJOR INCIDENTS SUCH AS OCCURRED IN AYN AL-RUMMANAH. END SUMMARY.

2. SYRIA IS IMMEDIATELY CONCERNED WITH ACHIEVING COMPLETE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON AND AVOIDING RECURRENCE OF MAJOR ARMED CLASHES IN LEBANON. ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD RECENT LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS IS BASED ON HOW THEY CONTRIBUTE TO REALIZING THESE SHORT-TERM GOALS, CONSONANT WITH ITS OVERALL STRATEGY OF RESTORING A SEMBLANCE OF STABILITY TO A UNIFIED LEBANESE STATE.

3. SYRIAN PRESS HAS NOT REPORTED NOR DIRECTLY COMMENTED ON THE SIX-POINT RESOLUTION HAMMERED OUT BY THE 13-MAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE AND PASSED WITH SLIGHT MODIFICATION BY THE LEBANESE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES. FOUAD KHADDAM DODGED OPPORTUNITY TO ENDORSE THE RESOLUTION DURING GEMAYEL'S RECENT VISIT STATING: "THIS IS A LEBANESE MATTER. WE ARE FOR EVERYTHING WHICH UPHOLDS LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY...WE ARE ALSO FOR EVERYTHING THAT CONSOLIDATES THE CAIRO AND RIYADH SUMMIT CONFERENCES." RECENT EDITORIALS IN THE SYRIAN PRESS, HOWEVER, AND STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS ISKANDAR AHMAD AND OTHERS SUGGEST THAT THE SYRIANS ARE LESS THAN PLEASED BY THE INHERENT CONTRADICTION IN THE RESOLUTION CALLING FOR ELIMINATION OF THE PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE, CONFIDENTIAL

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WHILE CHARGING THE ADF WITH IMPLEMENTING THE CAIRO AND RIYADH SUMMIT ACCORDS. AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE SYRIANS ARE ANGRY AT NOT HAVING BEEN CONSULTED ON THE SIX-POINT RESOLUTION.

4. WHILE A NUMBER OF SUNNI DEPUTIES HAVE PROFESSED TO SEE NOTHING IN THE SIX POINTS WHICH ABROGATES THE CAIRO-RIYADH AGREEMENTS, THE RESOLUTION CAN ONLY FURTHER COMPLICATE SYRIA'S RELATIONS WITH LEBANESE FRONT SUPPORTERS. SOME OF OUR SYRIAN INTERLOCUTORS CONSIDER THAT CHAMOUN AND SOME OTHER FRONT LEADERS, HAVING LEARNED THE DANGERS OF CHALLENGING SYRIA MILITARILY, ARE NOW MANEUVERING POLITICALLY TO EMBARRASS SYRIA AND ERODE THE BASIS FOR ITS CONTINUED PRESENCE IN LEBANON. IF THE LEBANESE FRONT COULD AGGRESSIVELY PUSH A NEW LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO IMPLEMENT THE PROVISIONS CLEARLY AIMED AT ENDING THE PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE IN THE COUNTRY, SYRIA WOULD BE FACED WITH A PAINFUL DILEMMA FROM WHICH IT COULD NOT EASILY ESCAPE. IF IT MOVED AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS, IT WOULD BECOME FURTHER ISOLATED IN THE ARAB WORLD AND CAUSE ITSELF SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH THE SOVIETS. IF IT PROCRASTINATED AND TEMPORIZED, THEN IT COULD EXPECT THAT CHAMOUN WOULD USE THIS AS A LEVER TO PRESS CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL TO TAKE A HARDER LINE AGAINST THE SYRIAN PRESENCE.

5. THE SYRIANS FORESEE THIS DANGER AND ARE MANEUVERING TO AVOID SUCH A STARK CHOICE. AWARE OF AND HOPING TO EXPLOIT DIFFERENCES EXISTING AMONG LF LEADERS, SYRIANS GAVE WARM WELCOME TO PIERRE GEMAYEL ON MAYA1 WHEN HE HELD SEVERAL HOURS OF TALKS WITH ASSAD, BG KHULI, AND KHADDAM AND LUNCHEDED WITH ASSAD. AFTER THE MEETINGS, KHADDAM IS QUOTED BY SANA AS SAYING THAT "PERIODICALLY TALKS SHOULD TAKE PLACE BETWEEN US AND OUR LEBANESE FRIENDS, WITH SHEIKH PIERRE GEMAYEL FOREMOST AMONG THEM". POLOFF ALSO RECENTLY OVERHEARD SEVERAL SENIOR AIDES OF BG KHULI SPEAKING IN POSITIVE TERMS OF DANY CHAMOUN IN CONTRAST WITH THEIR HOSTILE ATTITUDES TOWARD HIS FATHER. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SYRIAN PRESS HAS RUN A NUMBER OF EDITORIALS EMPHASIZING SYRIA'S GOOD INTENTIONS IN LEBANON AND THREATENING HARSH
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TREATMENT OF ANY FACTION WHICH TRIES "TO DISRUPT LEBANON'S SECURITY". THE LEBANESE FRONT IS IMPLICITE IDENTIFIED AS THE GROUP MOST LIKELY TO RENEW THE FIGHTING IN LEBANON. THUS, SYRIA, THROUGH A COMBINATION OF CAJOLERY AND THREAT, IS ATTEMPTING TO KEEP THE LID ON AND PREVENT ERUPTION OF MAJOR FIGHTING FROM ANY QUARTER, BUT PARTICULARLY FROM THE MARONITES.

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-----048579 090826Z /10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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6. NEVERTHELESS, THE SYRIANS CONTINUE TO AROUSE LF SUSPICIONS THROUGH THEIR OWN CLUMSINESS AND INSENSITIVITY. UN AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE SHOEFI CONFIRMED TO ME REPORTS OF SYRIAN INTERFERENCE IN EFFORTS TO FORM A NEW LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. SHOEFI WAS CRITICAL OF SYRIA'S OPPOSITION TO SAEB SALAM AS PM, CONTENDING THAT SYRIA ACCEPTED MARONITE LEADERS AS IT FOUND THEM AND SHOULD DO THE SAMTD WITH IPE MUSLIMS. HE SAW NO POINT IN PUSHING FOR INCLUSION IN CABINET OF ASSEM QANSU, WHOME HE DESCRIBED AS "WORTHLESS." HE SAID THAT EVEN THOUGH THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DISSATISFIED WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS THIS DID NOT JUSTIFY SYRIANCEFFORTS TO INFLUENCE FORMATION OF A NEW CABINET. SHOEFI IS, OF COURSE, RIGHT. SUCH TACTICS CAN ONLY HEIGHTEN LF SUSPICIONS AND LEAD TO PRESSURE FOR PREMATURE SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL.
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7. FOR THEIR PART, PALESTINIAN LEADERS, AT LEAST THE PRAGMATISTS AROUND ARAFAT, SEEM TO RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR POLITICAL SUPPORT AMONG THE LEBANESE MUSLIMS HAS ERODED BADLY AND THAT THEY CAN ILL AFFORD TO ANTAGONIZE SYRIA THERE BY PLAYING INTO CHRISTIAN HANDS. QADDUMI AND OTHERS HAVE MADE STATEMENTS INDICATING A WILLINGNESS TO RENEGOTIATE THEIR AGREEMENTS WITH THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES ONCE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL HAS BEEN REALIZED. FRENCH EMBOFF TOLD US THAT ARAFAT ADVISOR KHALID AL-HASAN HAD MADE SIMILAR CLAIMS TO THEM RECENTLY. AL-HASAN, LIKE THE SYRIANS, SEES FULL IDF WITHDRAWAL AND THE PRESENCE OF UNIFIL FORCES ACTING AS A FARRIER TO ISRAELI CROSS-BORDER ATTACKS ON FEDAYEEN FORCES. HE SAID THAT THE MAIN DESIRE OF THE FATAH WAS TO MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT PRESENCE IN LEBANON BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED RED LINE AND THE LITANI AND CONTINUED USE OF BEIRUT AS A PROPOAGANDA BASE. HIS REMARKS INDICATED THAT THE MORE PRAGMATIC PALESTINIANS RECOGNIZE THE FUTILITY OF INSISTING ON RETURNING TO THEIR FORMER OR "AUTHORIZED" POSITIONS SOUTH OF THE LITANI. WHILE THIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY A MANEUVER TO BUY TIME, IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE LINE FOR PALESTINIANS TO BE TAKING WITH THE SYRIANS.

8. IN ABSENCE OF MAJOR PALESTINIAN PROVOCATION, WE SEE NO REASON TO CHANGE OUR ASSESSMENT THAT THE SYRIANESARE NOT NOW INTERESTED IN MOVING THEIR FORCES TO THE LITANI OR

ENGAGING IN ANY MAJOR MILITARY ACTION AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS
ALTHOUGH THEY MAY ATTEMPT AGAIN TO REDUCE THE PLO'S
ARMED PROFILE IN THE COUNTRY. (THE UNDISCIPLINED NATURE
OF THE MOVEMENT AND THE PRESENCE OF PRO-IRAQI/REJECTIONIST
PROVACATEURS, HOWEVER, GUARANTEES FUTURE SYRO-PLO INCIDENTS
SUCH AS THE DUST-UP IN SIDON ON MAY 3). SHOUFI FORECASTS
NO POSSIBILITY OF REWRITING THE ACTUAL CAIRO ACCORDS.
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ALTHOUGH HE DID BELIEVE THAT NEW ATTEMPTS WOULD BE MADE TO
RESTRICT THE APPEARANCE OF ARMED PALESTINIANS IN PUBLIC.
HE FELT THAT NEITHER THE SYRIANS NOR ANYONE ELSE WOULD
BE WILLING TO TRY TO DISARM THEM.

9. SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON ARE NEVER EASY TO FATHOM.
WHILE THEY MAY BE PLEASED, AS QANSO CLAIMED, THAT MUSLIM
AND CHRISTIAN PWWS ARE AGAIN DEALING WITH ONE ANOTHER, THEY
ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN ASPECT OF SIX-POINT
RESOLUTION FOR THEIR CONTINUING ROLE IN LEBANON AND ARE
MANEUVERING BEHIND THE SCENES TO INSURE THAT THEY DO NOT
GET CAUGHT IN A TRAP OF CHAMOUN'S MAKING. THUS THE PROGNOSIS
IS FOR SYRIANS TO ATTEMPT TO FORESTALL NEW LEBANESE GOVERNMENT FROM
ORDERING ADF ACTION AGAINST ARMED PALESTINIANS, WHILE
URGING THE PALESTINIANS TO IMPLEMENT SHATAURA AGREEMENT
IN A WAY THAT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE NEW REALITIES SOUTH
OF THE LITANI. PELLETREAU

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, RESOLUTIONS, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC02623
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780195-1069
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780584/aaaactko.tel
Line Count: 254
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 6be9b4a2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2765252
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRIA WARY OF SIX-POINT RESOLUTION
TAGS: PEPR, PGOV, PINT, LE, SY, PLO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6be9b4a2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014